

Editorial Introduction

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Welcome to the fourth volume of the *Journal of the Oxford Graduate Theological Society* (JOGTS)! This issue's theme is "Faith and Fighting: Warfare and Its Theological and Religious Contours." In Michaelmas 2022, the JOGTS Editorial Board met to discuss prospective themes and decided on "Faith and Fighting" as an especially timely one. But what does this theme entail? Well, to give some idea, whether one considers the war-torn ancient Near East, the military conquests waged by Alexander the Great, the two World Wars, or the contemporary conflicts in Europe and other regions around the world, warfare seems an enduring element in human relations, governance, and culture. If often ignored or otherwise treated as ancillary to political and economic analyses, the theological and religious factors influencing, underlying, or resulting from warfare are nevertheless immeasurably important areas of inquiry. For example, studying church doctrine, religious movements, and specific beliefs about doctrinal topics such as immanence, transcendence, eternity, reincarnation, the afterlife, and immortality can shed valuable light upon the complex sociocultural and ideological reasons and dynamics giving rise to and shaping warfare. So, too, carefully studying theologians and religious scholars who have lived through war may disclose the ways in which thinkers past and present have used theological, philosophical, and religious resources to address the hellish realities in which they find themselves. In various ways, the contents comprising this fourth volume of JOGTS unearth and examine these types of questions and topics to thus explore the broad theme of "Faith and Fighting."

Of note, the issue specifically comprises a featured article, two full-length interviews, a sermon, and two book reviews.



Sarah Apetrei eloquently examines “editions and translations of mystical texts by Catholics at a time of aggressive anti-popish public discourse, the late Elizabethan and early Stuart periods” and considers “the significance of the military imagery used in this ‘peaceful war.’” In her analysis, Dr Apetrei draws attention to the fact that, though Catholic mysticism could and commonly was weaponised by its readers toward the end of formulating various apologetic arguments, “there was also an increasingly conscious intention among those promoting mystical spirituality [during the English Counter-Reformation of the 1540s through 1640s] to abstain from...religious division and sterile controversy,” including controversy that would incite religious and sectarian violence.

In an insightful and wide-ranging interview, Canon Professor Michael Snape dives deep to give us the results of his extensive scholarship and historical work on the relationship between religion and warfare, especially as manifest in his latest work, *A Church Militant: Anglicans and the Armed Forces from Queen Victoria to the Vietnam War* (Oxford University Press, 2022). One lamenting result noted in the interview, and a key realisation of Professor Snape’s research, is that, with respect to the relationship between the church and the armed forces, “religious factors are too often readily eliminated or filtered out of our analysis of contemporary complexities. We are locked in a Western paradigm of secularisation: religion is becoming more redundant, more marginal.” Professor Snape adds, “[t]here has to be a far more intelligent appraisal and understanding of the fact that where the West has led, the rest of the world will not necessarily follow—arguably in terms of perspectives on religion...[a] more complex, nuanced, and full understanding [of] the role of religion as a driving factor within conflicts, as well as a sustaining factor within conflict, must be grasped within the public sphere.”

Hailing from Zolotonosha, Ukraine, in a sermon given at the University Church of St Mary the Virgin in Oxford on 26 March 2023, Professor Cyril Hovorun provides a critical examination of Vladimir Putin and Russian aggression in the war in Ukraine since its escalation in February 2022. Without giving any aspect of his astute homily away, Professor Hovorun cogently critiques Putin, comparing him to his role model, Joseph Stalin, yet with far less theological competence and insight.

Mark G. Pomar provides an interview in which he discusses his vast experiences in “Cold War Radio” in multiple roles including Assistant Director of Russian Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty during the 1980s and 90s. Professor Pomar shares the way in which the Cold War was waged on the radio airwaves and both superpowers navigated the tremendously rich and complex discourse and propaganda of religion and irreligion as well as the war of ideas and ideals them.

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Topel, thank you for being our steadfast and reliable Reviews Editor. Fourth, thank you to the entire JOGTS Editorial Board and the assembly of peer reviewers near and far for your generous commitment of time and energy. Finally, thank you to the Advisory Board for your ongoing support and guidance. An especial thanks goes to Dr Sarah Apetrei, the Faculty in general and JOGTS in particular will undoubtedly miss you as our Director of Graduate Studies but we are comforted to know that you will not be going too far and we wish you all the very best as you undertake your new role at Champion Hall.

And, with that, all that remains is for me to wish the incoming Co-Editors, Elizabeth Clayton and Victoria Phillips, alongside the Editorial Board the very best venturing out into 2023–2024!